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ABSTRACT

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction originated and produced this guide to provide a resource for comprehensive kindergarten through twelfth grade reading program development. The chapters are presented in a sequence which gives emphasis to the belief that the people guiding the reading program--individual teachers and administrators--are key to the development and maintenance of a sound elementary-secondary reading program. Chapter one presents the rationale for adopting a reading program for the elementary and secondary grades. Chapter two suggests a way for building reading program leadership in local school districts. It identifies the groups that must be involved in program building and some steps for effective decision making by district leadership. Chapter three offers a logical sequence of activities that should comprise a comprehensive reading program. It addresses elements of reading program planning, implementation, and evaluation in a broad context to allow for local district variations. A special feature of the guide is that chapters two and three list related questions intended to stimulate and highlight discussion of pertinent issues. (RL)

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THE K-12 READING PROGRAM

A PLANNING RESOURCE

FOR

WISCONSIN SCHOOLS

PUBLISHED BY
WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
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CONTENTS

		Page
CHAPTER I	The Challenge	1
CHAPTER II	How to Get Started	4
CHAPTER III	A Process for Reading Program Improvement	11
CHAPTER IV	The Payoff	34

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PREFACE

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction is pleased to present this new publication on reading programs to the schools of the State of Wisconsin.

Responsibility for elementary reading instruction has traditionally been the concern of the local school district. Consequently, well planned and well administered programs exist across Wisconsin in grades K-6. Remedial reading instruction has been afforded in junior and senior high schools for those students requiring such instruction; however, few high schools have had developmental reading programs with reading instruction offered through grade 12. Legislation passed in Wisconsin 1977 requires public schools to provide K-12 developmental reading programs, with appropriate reading instruction for all students at all grade levels. This requirement has brought about local district evaluation of existing reading programs and a trend toward K-12 reading program development.

Resulting efforts toward program organization revealed that there are few resources available to assist reading specialists, administrators and teachers with K-12 developmental reading program assessment and planning. Of the publications available, some stress specialized instruction for groups of students with special needs. Others, by implication, place a disproportionate emphasis on a single component of a balanced program or on the use of a specific set of instructional materials.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction originated and produced this guide to present a point of view on reading and reading programs. It is also intended to serve as a resource for comprehensive K-12 reading program development in Wisconsin school districts. By attending to the elements of reading program planning, implementation and evaluation which are presented here, schools should be able to utilize their existing resources while extending and expanding programs to provide appropriate reading instruction to all Wisconsin students.

The chapters are presented in a sequence which gives emphasis to our belief that the people guiding the reading program—individual teachers and administrators—are key to the development and maintenance of a sound K-12 reading program. The chapters are intentionally brief; this guide is intended to provide a framework for the work of reading program improvement conducted by concerned, involved people in a school district. It is not intended to be a curriculum guide or specific skills list.

How to Use This Guide

A special feature of the guide is that in addition to being informative, the final sections of Chapters II and III list related questions. The questions are intended to be thought stimulating and to highlight some pertinent issues for discussion. Users of the guide will wish to read the chapters and the related questions. Through deliberation of the information presented, the issues raised by the listed questions, and unique local questions, it is hoped the users will be assisted to make sound judgments designed to improve reading instruction in the district.

Eunice Bethke, Ph.D.
Chief, Reading Section

I. The Challenge

In this chapter, the rationale for adopting a K-12 reading program is presented. Obstacles to changing current district practices in teaching reading are explored along with a brief discussion of what must be done to initiate change.

Why All the Fuss About a K-12 Reading Program?

Reading is so closely intertwined with the process of schooling that one can hardly imagine a school without a reading program. But while some programs have been carefully built, others have simply grown like topsy, with no particular focus. That's what the fuss is about; building reading programs that have focus and that systematically address the needs of students at all levels. These are some reasons why such an approach is needed:

To reflect and accommodate the changing demands of the developmental reading task. Two things happen to the reading task as a student moves through the K-12 school experience: first, the nature of the primary task shifts from *learning to read* at the elementary level to *reading to learn* at the post-elementary level. A systematic program should provide structure, transition, and guidance as the student first learns how to read and then applies what he or she has learned in all areas of the curriculum. Second, the reading task becomes more complex and more self-directed as the subject matter increases in difficulty. A systematic program should be directed toward enabling the student to deal with the increased demands.

To provide for application as well as acquisition of reading skills. As it is now, many schools do a satisfactory job of describing their primary-elementary school reading programs, where the acquisition of reading skills is stressed. But few schools have a program that provides systematic instruction in the *application* of those skills in all of the content areas. Consequently, the program breaks down at the very point where students would begin to profit most from what they have learned.

To permit coordination of the teaching of reading across subject matter areas. Certain reading skills are most appropriately applied in certain subject matter areas. With a planned program, teachers in the different content areas can take responsibility for those skills that have the highest yield in their particular content area. Such an approach would get us away from the naive and erroneous notion the *everybody* can be responsible for *everything*.

To permit coordination of "special" services with a profusion of federal and state programs, special interest groups and other demands. Many schools have a smorgasbord reading program: a collection of independent bits and pieces intended to satisfy a wide range of appetites. With a comprehensive reading program to provide a framework, specific programs can be coordinated so they contribute to—not fly in the face of—an overall goal. Without such a program, students who are referred to, say, remedial reading will continue to be more often afflicted than assisted.

To give assurance that reading needs and responsibilities for teaching reading have visibility at all levels and in all areas of the curriculum. The ability to read is basic to success throughout the school experience: this fact is so obvious that it can become commonplace and, as a result, be neglected. An all-school, all-level program gives some assurance that the obvious will not become commonplace. If students' reading needs and teachers' responsibilities for meeting those needs are kept prominent, then reading will get the attention it requires at all levels and students will be more likely to be assigned reading tasks that are in line with their abilities.

To give assurance that reading be given the importance it deserves in the school curriculum. Students' ability to read is probably the most visible product of the schools. The public expects, first, that students will succeed in learning how to read and, then, that they will be able to cope with the reading tasks they encounter both in and out of school. At the most pragmatic level, an all-school K-12 reading program addresses an important public relations function of the schools.

What are the Obstacles to Building a Coherent K-12 Reading Program?

Most of the reasons for developing a K-12 reading program have been verbalized many times in the past. Yet, despite recognition of the need, relatively little has been done to meet it. Apathy is not the explanation. Most schools direct a great many of their resources to teaching reading and to remedial programs. The problem is that there are many obstacles in the way of developing a comprehensive K-12 program—and each of them must be dealt with. The first step toward dealing with these obstacles is to recognize them. Here are some of the most troublesome obstacles.

Inertia. Probably the most obvious obstacle is simple—but total—inertia. Unless there is a decision to move, there is no movement. But partial inertia may be even more troublesome. An example of partial inertia is a situation where there has been a decision to adapt comprehensive goals for the reading program but no real changes in terms of teaching methods, class schedules, or materials available have been brought to bear. When materials and procedures are out of phase with goals, there can be no effective reading program.

Lack of coordination. Textbooks say that a good overall reading program includes provision for a full spectrum of student needs, e.g., developmental, corrective, remedial, accelerated, and adapted. Too often when these provisions are made, there is no overall coordination. One result is that remedial instruction is often isolated from the developmental program of instruction. Another is that learning problems which could readily be handled in the classroom are overcomplicated by referral to special programs. Coordination of all aspects of the reading program requires that there be a carefully constructed overall plan.

Contradictory programs. This obstacle includes aspects of the two obstacles just described and more. All too often one finds special programs in operation that either fly in the face of the overall program or, just as bad, bespeak the fact that there is no overall program. The problem seems to be that programs get started and soon become vested. Once vested, they continue, no matter whether the continuation makes sense or not. Consider a prime example—a school which bases its remedial program of instruction on one set of materials, its "enrichment" program on another set of materials, and its developmental instruction on still another set of materials. With such materials-based subprograms there is little chance that they share any coherent focus.

Tunnel vision. Teachers at the primary level—and to a great extent, at the entire elementary level—are likely to see the teaching of reaching as their main responsibility. Teachers at the post-elementary level are apt to see the teaching of reading as "somebody else's" responsibility. The result is that—no matter what the curriculum guide says—reading gets taught at the early levels and it does not get taught at the upper levels.

False security. Another view of the tunnel vision obstacle shows it as a false security phenomenon: upper level teachers do not concern themselves with reading because "they teach that in the lower grades." The lower grade teachers do; but the going gets rougher at the upper grade levels, and the responsibility for seeing to the *application* of what was taught earlier never ceases.

Employment practices. An effective reading program requires careful planning in the first place, but then it requires creative and aggressive implementation. Successful implementation requires both leadership and effective teaching. Employment practices are sometimes such that (a) effective leadership is not provided (e.g., a reading coordinator is assigned the job although not the most qualified individual), and (b) the requirements for effective teaching are slighted (e.g., adequate staff and budget, appropriate scheduling, district-wide inservice training).

Lack of an overall plan. This obstacle may be too obvious to mention, but, the reason some schools do not have a sensible reading program is that the staff has never expended the effort to plan one. Good reading programs never just happen; they are purchased at the price of careful, long-term planning.

Lack of effective inservice programs for teachers. Let's face it; teachers cannot do what they do not know how to do. The successful implementation of any program has a bottom line requirement: that teachers be informed about need for the plan and then they be trained in how to implement it.

Budget problems. No point spending all your money on a Jaguar if it means you cannot afford to buy gas. Likewise, there is no point putting a fancy program on paper if there is no chance of implementing it. Sometimes we price our reading programs out of the market. Then we can blame bad times for lack of action. But a realistic plan does require a respectable budget. The money can be provided if the right people see the need.

What Can be Done to Initiate Change?

Every school has a reading program. Schools with a coherent program have them by design; others have them only by chance (e.g., their "program" is the basal reader series they have adopted). The point here is that the process of building a K-12 reading program never starts with a clean sheet of paper. Because this is so, one must recognize from the start that the process involves more than simply describing a program, no matter how skillfully that might be done. The process involves *change*, change from established perceptions and practices to something that is different—therefore, threatening—to most participants.

Building a K-12 reading program, then, ought to be viewed not only as a process of planning and implementing a comprehensive program that is in line with local needs and resources, but also a process of bringing about change in existing—and often firmly entrenched—practices.

The following are some suggestions for getting started:

Read the rest of this manual. The purpose of this resource is to set out specifications for developing and implementing a K-12 reading program. The resource provides both guidelines and references.

Provide leadership and seek commitment. Leadership must be identified early to provide impetus for next steps. One person or a small, working committee may get the ball rolling. In either case the role must be filled and the responsibilities must be clear. Equally important is the commitment to the task by the entire staff. Without commitment, there will be no real implementation of whatever plan evolves. Commitment should be sought early, while the planning is getting started. Later is too late.

Attend to the principles of dynamic educational change. The pressure and need for change in reading programs is great, as it is throughout education. However, the resistance to change is also great. Until recently there have been few clearly defined procedures for educational planners to follow. An excellent reference is Zaltman, G., Florio, D. H., and Sikorski, L. A., Dynamic Educational Change. New York: The Free Press, 1977. This resource shows how to use planning as a systematic way to prepare for and make decisions that result in action. The Right to Read Assessment and Planning Handbook offers a planning alternative. It is published by the U.S. Office of Education and is available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, for $2.35. [Stock No. 017-080-01390-8]

II. How to get Started

This section presents a discussion of the need for leadership and a way for building reading program leadership in a local school district. It identifies the groups which must be involved in program building and some steps for effective decision-making by the district leadership.

Foster Total Staff Commitment to the K-12 Reading Program

A key to an effective reading program seems to be "ownership." Administrators must feel involved with their reading program because they provide the leadership to implement it. Teachers must feel it is their program because they help to plan and carry it out. The school board, the parents, and the community must feel proud of their school's reading program because they have a say in how it came about. And most important, students must believe that their reading program will help to make them competent readers who enjoy learning through reading. A climate of commitment and ownership begins with vital leadership which can help administrators, teachers, specialized personnel, aides, volunteers, and parents become intent on pooling their knowledge and efforts to provide the best facilities, organizational patterns, instructional techniques, and materials to help all students read to the best of their individual capabilities.

Let us examine how leadership develops, how your decision-making processes function, and how you can elicit administrative support and teacher commitment to assist in creating or improving the K-12 reading program for your school. Remember, however, that no school distict will ever achieve the goal of a perfect reading program. Reading programs are by nature dynamic. Even when it looks good on paper, a reading program needs continual nurturing to allow it to grow with its readers' needs.

Build a Leadership Team

Developing a successful K-12 reading program requires effective leadership. Leaders are those who have an understanding of the reading process, can work effectively with others, and have strong decision-making abilities. No matter how good the plans for improving a reading program are, they cannot succeed if the leadership does not exist to put them into effect.

Each school system's beginning effort will be different, growing out of local conditions and interpretations. However, a common need exists for identifying leadership personnel and their tasks to assist with decision-making. The following steps may provide guidance:

Find a catalyst—a person or group. One person, or at most a small group of leaders with a strong interest in reading and a commitment to improvement, can provide the spark that sets the whole process moving. This leadership may come from the district superintendent, a building principal, a curriculum specialist, the district reading specialist, or a reading teacher. Ideally, two or three qualified staff members will work together to initiate an improved reading program.

Establish a working task force. This core group of leaders then creates a small working task force made up of the most knowledgeable, enthusiastic, influential, and talented individuals in the school system. This group could draw on reading consultants, reading teachers, Title I teachers, principals, and curriculum specialists. To be effective, it should include no more than four to seven people, who will take responsibility for organizing the decision-making process, planning for staff involvement, developing test instruments, instructional materials, and documents, and carrying out decisions.

The initial task of this task force is to conduct the needs assessment. The purpose of the needs assessment is to analyze the current reading program from various perspectives, uncover the strengths and weaknesses of the program, and begin to discuss what revisions and additions should be considered.

Seek advice. At this point, a district reading committee may be formed to act as the advisory group for the working task force. This committee can include representatives from all staff who will be responsible for carrying out the reading program improvements: teachers from all levels who hold expertise in materials development, instructional techniques, and classroom management.

Other advisors may be administrators and support personnel such as school psychologists, librarians, guidance personnel, and curriculum consultants. Parents, community members, school board members, and students may also be represented.

Involve Administrators, Principals, and School Board Members

The involvement of adminstrators should begin with the very beginning of the change process. Administrators need to establish guidelines for the duties and powers of the reading task force right away. It is useless to set up a reading task force unless administrators:

Create adequate time, budget, and authority for changes. Administrators have an overall view of the entire school program, and therefore, they must understand why the changes are being proposed and what effect they will have on the rest of the school. If a change seems to require new facilities, personnel, or materials, administrators must know about it. They will play an important part in making selections and bringing about positive outcomes.

Inform the school board. Adminstrators play an important part in working with the school board, since the approval of the board will probably be necessary in order to make changes. Administrators should inform and involve the board as early as possible and keep them posted. Then when budgetary or personnel decisions must be made, there will be support and commitment from the district policy-making group.

Assign specific rsponsibility for system-wide coordination, motivation, and priorities for the improved program. Staff members look to administrators for leadership and support. Without the administration's total involvement, even the most worthwhile decisions will never be fully implemented. Although the specific responsibilities of district personnel are usually defined by the district itself, we can offer some general guidelines for two very important staff members: the school principal and the reading coordinator. The attitudes and involvement of these two individuals can literally make or break a reading program.

The principal, perhaps more than anybody else, knows the characteristics of the staff, parents, children, and community, and can gauge the effectiveness of various changes proposed for the school. The principal must support and encourage opportunities for staff to be involved and retrained. At the same time, the principal must remain accessible to constructive criticism, comments, and suggestions. By opening communication channels, a climate for growth and change can be sustained.

Involve Specially-Trained Reading Staff

The district reading coordinator is a licensed specialist with skill in reading as well as in administration, public relations, and program evaluation. The reading coordinator assumes primary responsibility for continuity and transitions required as the reading program develops. This specialist serves as a liaison between schools, principals, curriculum coordinators, the superintendent, the school board, classroom teachers, reading teachers, students, other special support personnel, and the community. Exactly how much authority this person will have and assignment of the role to either administrator or teacher status will vary from district to district, but should be clearly spelled out as the program develops.

Teachers having advanced training in and special responsibilities for teaching reading have a unique interest in the development of a comprehensive reading program. They can be helpful to the leadership team by assisting with communication to other staff members, and by serving on various assessment and planning committees.

Involve Classroom Teachers

A classroom teacher's commitment is essential to the success of any reading program. That commitment is built only by involving teachers in both the needs assessment and decision-making process from the outset. Teachers must generate ideas, and be involved in every step of the planning process. The problems and the proposed solutions must already be familiar to them by the

time final decisions are made. The implementation of a progam in which goals, skills, and instructional techniques may be new requires that the staff determine how the new program can best be carried out. Time must be allotted for the teachers to be trained, and for them to discuss how the changes will affect them.

Here are some practical suggestions for involving teachers in developing the reading program. Teachers themselves will find much to add to this list.

1. Foster the "grass roots" sense of the need for change by including teacher representatives on reading planning and assessment committees, and by establishing and maintaining a clear communication system through committee members with staff members.

2. At the implementation level, the teaching staff must identify the skills required by the new program, locate them in an appropriate sequence and determine procedures for making the program work for themselves and for students

3. New goals and new concepts for skill development may require even experienced teachers to seek new ways to teach. Master teachers in the system, well-planned commercial materials, and the special talents of individuals can introduce the creative teaching techniques to best facilitate the new program. Inservice sessions cooperatively planned by teachers and administrators will be necessary to help teachers make these techniques functional.

Make thoughtful decisions

Once a school has developed a leadership core, then the second fundamental stage in improving your reading program can begin. To provide for continuous improvement to meet changing needs of the student population, program designers must provide a structure for ongoing and effective decision making. Effective decision making is fundamental to improving reading instruction. Without the proper kind of decisions, program development will result in professional busy work, writing unrealistic goals, inadequate program assessment and nonfunctioning committees. The following six guidelines may assist leadership committees to make sound decisions:

1. Decisions must be based on the best knowledge available. Only people who have the experience, expertise, and sound judgment about reading program development should be trusted with the authority and responsibility for decision making.

2. Decisions must be timely. The best decision can totally fail if it comes too soon or too late in the change process.

3. Decisions must be reasonable. Program developers should not make or implement decisions which are over complex, or counter productive to already existing successful programs in other areas.

4 Decisions must be backed by authority. Too often a committee is called together to write goals, conduct assessments, and propose changes. Yet this committee never received the authority or administrative backing to carry out their decisions. Adequate budgets and facilities may not even have been provided.

5. Decisions must be supportive of staff. Staff members who are expected to carry out decisions cannot be effective unless they have been involved or consulted. No effective reading program can be indifferent to the working and planning schedules of teachers.

6. Decisions must be communicated. All staff must be made aware of proposed changes along with a summary of the reasoning and justification for the decision. Often it's not that staff are negative or disagree; it's that the rationale for the decision which was made was not communicated.

Questions for Discussion

Chapter II: How to Get Started

Build a Leadership Team: Planners might consider the following questions for discussion.

1. How should the reading coordinator's job be specifically defined?
2. What effective characteristics should the reading coordinator have to be more effective in the job in this school district?
3. What process might be used to identify a person for this position?
4. What are the possibilities for retraining someone within the district for the position?
5. What is the authority of the reading coordinator in relationship to other district personnel such as principals? Classroom teachers? Reading teachers? Reading resource teachers?
6. What budget allocations will be made to the coordinator to financially assist in developing the reading program?
7. How will the roles of the district reading staff be related to the role of the coordinator of the district reading program?
8. How can the roles of district reading staff be coordinated to best support students and the reading program?
9. What kinds of communication systems need to be established within a school between specialized reading instruction and classroom reading instruction?

Notes:

Involve Administrators: Principals might consider the following questions for discussion.

1. What information will I need to gather about my school to assist the reading coordinator with program implementation?
2. How can I best support the district reading coordinator?
3. What financial support will be needed from my budget for reading materials and for assisting teachers to become more involved?
4. What positive incentives and motivation can I provide my teachers to encourage good reading instruction?
5. What can I do to better recognize the various forms good reading instruction can take?
6. How can I involve my teachers in making decisions about putting the district plan into operation in the school?
7. What can I do to encourage my teachers to test new ideas in the classroom?
8. What can I do to encourage children to read for enjoyment and information?
9. What can I do to keep the community informed about what is happening with the reading program?
10. What will I need to do to coordinate the efforts of classroom teachers, reading teachers, reading resource teachers, and other support personnel in my school?
11. How can I gain time for my teachers to plan for change and update themselves in the area of reading?

Notes:

Involve Classroom Teachers: Planners might consider the following questions for discussion.

1. What are the specific needs of individual classroom teachers related to the reading program? The performance of students? Their own performance?
2. What types of inservice programs would best meet teachers' needs?
3. How can teachers become directly involved in developing inservice?
4. How can teachers become directly involved in implementing the district reading program at the school level?
5. What would be the best follow-up procedures to encourage teachers to apply inservice information?
6. How can teachers become directly involved in determining the reading goals for the district? Assessing the district reading needs? Planning activities to meet the needs of the district reading program?
7. What role will the teachers play in evaluating the components of the reading program and the effectiveness of the program?
8. What role will teachers play in selecting instructional materials? Supplementary materials?
9. How can high school teachers become involved in planning the secondary reading program? In developing appropriate instructional activities?

Notes:

Make Decisions: Planners might consider the following questions for discussion.

1. What is the appropriate sequence for implementing the changes in the reading program?
2. What time frame is appropriate for each change?
3. What financial considerations influence each change?
4. What additional points should be considered in determining how changes will occur? What are some options?
5. What personnel requirements must be considered for the proposed changes? Retraining? Reassignment? Hiring new personnel?
6. What personnel will assume responsibility for what parts of the implementation for reading program changes? Personnel included here are: classroom teachers, aides, principals, reading teachers, reading resource teachers, Title I teachers, reading specialists, reading coordinators, special support personnel, curriculum coordinators, and superintendents.
7. How can positive attitudes be built toward the proposed changes, particularly among the personnel who have not been involved to this point?
8. What parent and community cooperation is necessary to make the proposed changes?
9. What overall organizational plan would be effective and will involve people from each personnel level of the school district?
10. What training and assistance will the classroom teachers need to carry out program changes effectively?

Notes:

III. A Process for Reading Program Improvement

This chapter presents a logical sequence of activities which, if followed, can result in a comprehensive K-12 reading program. It addresses elements of reading program planning, implementation and evaluation in a broad context to allow for local district variations in program development.

State a Philosophy of Reading

The first step in program development is to state a philosophical base for the reading program. The statement should present local beliefs and local definitions for reading and the reading program taking into consideration the views of the reading task force, administrators, teachers, school board members, and others. The statement should reflect a deep understanding of the reading process and of the problems involved in reading instruction, and broadly interpret the goals of the reading program. From this "we believe" statement will flow the specific goals and objectives of the district reading program.

Set Goals

Once a leadership core has been developed, the involvement of other interested school and community personnel has been secured, and a "point of view" reached, the district is ready to design the reading program. The first step is to set goals. These goals will guide the district to (a) set objectives, (b) design or select instructional strategies, (c) train staff, (d) establish effective measurement techniques, and (e) evaluate the program after it has been established.

Goals should be broad and provide overall guidance for program development. District-wide goals based on priorities identified in the assessment of the current program might include:

1. Training K-12 teachers to become knowledgeable about the process of an improved reading program and willing to assume the responsibility of implementing it.

2. Developing continuity in the reading program providing for sequential skill development, appropriate instruction at each educational level, and opportunities for more advanced skill instruction when initial mastery has been accomplished.

3. Developing shared responsibility for the results of the improved reading program that includes administrators, teachers, specialists, the school board, parents, and the students themselves.

4. Developing a reading program that continually keeps up with current reading research in its skill content, instructional techniques, and educational materials.

5. Developing readers who are becoming increasingly proficient in a skill which will serve them throughout their lives as members of a complex society.

These are only examples, and your program may omit some of these points and include many others.

Assess the Existing Program

Districts faced with the task of improving their reading programs may well feel overwhelmed. Each school is unique and each will find itself in a different stage of reading program development. For example, some schools may just have adopted a new basal reading series, instituted a new junior high reading program, or conducted a reading inservice training session for high school teachers. These schools may have to ask themselves how successful their new programs are and how they relate to other existing programs.

Other schools might already have identified some serious gaps—inadequate library facilities in the elementary schools, declining test scores in middle schools, or large numbers of high school students who can't even read. These schools must develop programs that address these problems.

Still other schools may feel comfortable with their current reading programs. Yet these, too, should carefully examine their existing arrangements to decide whether improvements are feasible, what resources are available, and what changes could be made.

Assessment amounts to analyzing the current reading program by systematically observing it. The most common observation procedure is to use an assessment instrument such as a formal questionnaire. While such an instrument can be helpful, it should be accompanied by other procedures, including organized group discussions, open-ended surveys, individual conferences, test scores, direct observations, evaluations by outside survey teams, and comparisons with an existing quality program elsewhere. For total program assessment, you should include attitudes of students, staff competency to teach reading, adequacy of money and time spent on reading, adequacy of arrangements for student use of the library or IMC, and similar questions. Assessment in each of these areas may require a different format.

When selecting assessment formats, the following questions should be considered:

What is the purpose of this assessment? Assessment should include questions that provide basic data from which to make program decisions. For example, the question, "How many reading aides do we have?" would be less helpful than, "How effective are the reading aides in helping students with reading problems?" The task force should make the purpose of the assessment perfectly clear to everyone involved. This way respondents can be encouraged to volunteer all the information they consider relevant.

What will you assess? Once the purpose is clear, the task force must determine just what aspects of the reading program need to be observed to answer their questions effectively. There is no point in counting the number of books available for free reading if the task force is interested only in the effectiveness of the basal program.

Who will you assess? Along with what to assess, the task force must consider who will be assessed. Not all teachers need to be surveyed on all questions. Some questions may go only to special education staff, or secondary teachers, or even possibly physical education teachers. Sometimes students themselves provide the best information, especially about programs designed to improve attitudes toward reading. Observing students' behavior, such as what they do in their spare time, or whether they choose reading when given a choice, can be an invaluable assessment tool.

What to do with your assessment results? Only when assessment leads to effective decisions that improve the reading program is the time and effort involved justified. Too often assessments are conducted in a vacuum and information is simply filed away because nobody knows what to do with it. Once the reading task force has collected the data, its job is to analyze the information to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative.

One of the most important results that comes from assessment is the discovery of all the good things already happening in the school. Highly effective procedures that have been quietly operating with great success have a chance to be noticed and possibly expanded. Teachers develop a sense of pride in knowing that they are doing a good job and for the most part are helping students learn to read. Information gathered during assessment can be communicated to parents and the community to inform them about the positive aspects of the school.

Weaknesses should be looked at as just that: areas where special work is needed to strengthen the reading program. An example might be an excellent developmental program through grade six but little or no follow-through in the upper grade level programs. Another example might be a well-equipped, fully staffed IMC that is not being effectively used by teachers or students. Or there could be an excellent special corrective reading program suffering from isolation or poor coordination with the rest of the developmental program. Missing, poorly integrated, or obsolete areas highlighted by your assessment procedures should be listed in order to make decisions on possible priorities. This is the next step in developing your reading program.

Set Priorities

A whole program cannct be revamped at once. To attempt to do so is to invite failure, by spreading attention, energy, personnel, and financial resources too thin. While it is useful to have an overall view of the total program, the decision-making process can only involve a limited number of choices at a time, so districts must decide on priorities among the deficiencies pointed out in the assessment.

The statement of goals drawn up earlier is one aid to setting priorities. If concerns have been expressed about the reading proficiency of high school graduates, then the quality of the high school reading program would hold high priority. If decline in enrollment in elementary schools calls for program consolidation, then this area would require immediate attention. If middle school students have been shown to have consistent difficulty reading their textbooks, integration of reading instruction with other curricular areas would be a high priority.

In setting priorities, planners may ask which improvements will have the greatest impact on improving reading at the time. Among several possible improvements, they may elect to begin with changes that will improve instruction for a large number of students before working on those that will benefit fewer readers. Or they may see that the goals they have set demand attention to certain areas of high visibility to the public. Whatever the needs located by assessment, and whatever the goals of the district reading program, priorities will determine the sequence of development from this point on.

Identify the Components of the K-12 Reading Program

Although all schools may develop unique reading programs, most programs will share common broad characteristics no matter what materials, methods, or organizational plans are used. The main purposes of a balanced reading program are: (1) to provide direct instruction in how to read, (2) to provide guidance in applying reading skills not only in the elementary grades but through high school, and (3) to provide experiences and activities which will foster reading as a lifelong habit, for enjoyment and personal achievement. The first major task of reading program planners is to identify the curriculum content and teaching techniques for these goals that reflect the philosophy of the individual school.

The basic instructional program provides for teaching four basic components: (1) word analysis, (2) comprehension, (3) reading study skills and habits (content area and functional reading skills), and (4) independent reading. Not only the teaching of these skills but all of the teaching related to reading that goes on in any given school must be coordinated by an overall plan—the reading program. When a well-planned program is effectively implemented, there is much less danger that any single aspect of instruction will be isolated from or at odds with the rest. Adherence to a clearly stated set of district-wide goals and application of the findings of a comprehensive, on-going evaluation process will help maintain a well integrated total reading program. With this in mind, let's take a closer look at each of the basic components of a balanced reading program.

Word Analysis

The ability to handle basic "decoding"—that is, the letter-sound correspondence code that enables pronunciation of written words—is basic to seeking the meaning of words that result in reading comprehension.

In an ordinary developmental situation, word analysis skills are taught in a sequence that is in tune with the materials students are expected to read and that enables readers to cope with the printed words. The word analysis component incorporates skills from five major skills clusters: prereading/kindergarten, sight words, phonics, structural analysis, and contextual analysis. Program planners may wish to develop a sequence for teaching these clusters and to state objectives for judging whether a student has reached proficiency with each.

Prereading/Kindergarten. Reading to children is an excellent way to begin to teach about reading. Children's responses to words and books are indicators of their readiness for more formal, specific instruction.

Research indicates that some pre-first graders are more interested in printing than reading, and, in fact, learn to read through efforts with printing and spelling, therefore, opportunities to learn to print should be provided. As vocabularies grow known words explored through the language experience approach can be used to help children understand the alphabetic nature of written language. Only if children demonstrate the ability to understand and remember letter-sound relationships should phonics be pursued. To do otherwise may foster negative attitudes toward reading, and perhaps toward school.

The point about early reading instruction is that the quality of instruction made available is key. Whole class paper and pencil drill on phonics is probably poor instructional practice; attention to pre-reading skills for children who are ready to read and reading instruction for those who have begun to read is appropriate and can be enjoyable for the children.

Sight Words. Teaching sight words as a part of the word analysis component is valuable for several reasons. First, early learning of a few well-chosen sight words can help to assure successful first experiences with the process of getting meaning from printed symbols. Second, sight words provide a basis for teaching phonics skills through analysis of the sounds that make up meaningful words. On the other hand, certain frequently encountered words are not phonetically regular and are most efficiently taught as sight words for that reason. A relatively small number of words occur so frequently in printed materials that they include a large percentage of all the words encountered in print. Consequently, learning a few high frequency words as sight words enhances a reader's potential for fluent reading.

Phonics. The application of phonics skills should enable a reader to pronounce words that have not been seen before in print. Mastery of essential phonics skills and the inclination and ability to apply them are both prerequisites of independent reading. Lists of phonics skills vary widely in content and sequence. The reading task force should coordinate instruction in phonics skills with instruction being offered in other curriculum areas.

Structural Analysis. A step beyond phonics skills is structural analysis skills. The purpose for teaching structural analysis skills is to help the learner to pick out already known meaningful parts of words. Teaching structural analysis calls for attention to root words, affixes, and inflected words. Plurals, tenses, comparisons, contractions and compound words also need direct instruction. By examining words in order to discover meaningful parts, students may be able to figure out independently both the pronunciation and the meaning of many new words when they are first encountered in print.

Contextual Analysis. Phonics and structural analysis skills focus the reader's attention on individual words, but contextual analysis goes beyond the words to the surrounding context to identify an unfamiliar word. A reader uses contextual analysis to "figure out the word by the way it is used in a sentence or passage." Contextual analysis is useful not only for figuring out new printed words that are already in the reader's oral vocabulary but also for figuring out new meanings for known words and attaching meanings to unfamiliar words. The clues involved in effective contextual analysis include typographic, pictorial, stylistic, syntactic, and semantic clues. Contextual analysis ("what word could make sense here or what word fits here") is a general orientation rather than a collection of discrete, generalizable skills. It amounts to an inclination to seek out whatever clues may be available in order to bolster or supplant phonics and structural analysis skills when dealing with a reading task. The background knowledge and information a student brings to the printed page is important to using contextual analysis. The reading program should cooperate with content areas to encourage growth in this area through actual and vicarious experiences.

Comprehension

While some educators doubt that comprehension can actually be taught at all, sufficient research evidence exists to suggest that instruction can aid comprehension for many students. Even while structuring a reading program on the position that comprehension *can* be taught,

instruction must acknowledge that reading comprehension is indeed influenced by many factors. Some of these are variables related to the written message itself such as sentence complexity and the presence or absence of visual displays. Others are variables present in the reading environment—the home and the school. Another class of factors internal to the reader include linguistic competence, interest, motivation, and decoding ability. The reading program should provide materials, environments, and instruction that are mutually reinforcing.

The difficulty of a given comprehension skill is determined by the context in which it is applied. Developmentally, one learns to apply the "same" skill to more and more complex materials, rather than learning increasingly "complex" skills. Consequently, a teacher cannot look for mastery of comprehension skills in the conventional sense. To infer that a student has mastered "getting the main idea," for example, because he or she can perform that task with third grade materials would be inappropriate. What about fourth grade materials—or eighth?

Comprehension skills can be organized into four major clusters: (1) skills for getting meaning from words, (2) skills for getting meaning from sentences, (3) skills for getting meaning from paragraphs or selections, and (4) study skills for identifying the overall organization of a text, such as understanding implied and explicit sequences.

Readers must continue to learn to round out their word-skills, using explicit and implicit context clues to discover word meanings and to add new meaningful words to an expanding vocabulary. In addition, they need to be taught the importance of certain words which convey cues to organization of the material they are reading.

The reading program can provide instruction in getting meaning from sentences by encouraging readers to develop and to apply critical thinking skills. Students need a basic comprehension of the details of sentences and need to be able to paraphrase what they have read by rearranging and substituting words. Perhaps the best materials for teaching these skills are the sentences in the content area material that is used in day-to-day activities.

In designing the reading program, the task force should keep in mind that ultimately the reader's job is to derive meaning not only from words and sentences but from longer selections consisting of two or more— often many more—sentences. Readers need to develop skills related to getting the main idea of a selection (while sorting out irrelevant details) and skills that focus on the relationships and conclusions expressed in a selection. Students also need to identify and deal with the order of events being presented.

Students need to read a variety of materials for different purposes. They must develop the ability to read all kinds of materials, to apply the skills which they have learned and to adapt their reading for different purposes. For example, a novel for recreational reading is approached in a different manner than a news editorial or a mathematics textbook. Reading in mathematics requires the students to read in directions other than left to right, and to reread some parts of the text before performing a task. A novel will not often include words like isosceles, quadrilateral, and algorithm, but a math student must have instant grasp of these polysyllabic words. The newspaper requires selective skimming. Reading catalogs, application blanks, road signs, etc. requires other skills such as isolating the areas of interest and discarding information that is not needed.

The task of building a sound content/functional reading component is an important one. The reading program must assure that skills are indeed taught and used within the content where they are required, and not left to chance.

The reading task force must develop a reading program that enables all these skills to be taught with increasingly more difficult materials. The skills cannot be "taught to mastery" with materials of a given difficutly level and then ignored in further instruction, as we have emphasized. They must be given attention so long as the student attends school.

Reading Study Skills and Habits

Comprehension strategies required for reading maps, charts, graphs, for organizing reading of a text, and adjusting reading rate, require attention in a balanced reading program. In addition, students need to learn how to use basic reference materials such as dictionaries, the library card

catalogue and other specialized library material, such as the encyclopedia to support their study reading effectively. Techniques for test taking, class projects and reports, and term paper composition are also part of the set of study skills related to content areas.

Word recognition, comprehension, and study skills taught in the basic program prepare and support students in their reading of a wide range of material. A major concern is that these skills be employed in the contexts of independent content areas, and in functional reading. Although many students will transfer their learning without direct assistance from the teacher, others will not. Therefore, the assumption cannot be made that what is taught in isolation will automatically transfer. Provisions need to be made for this transfer of skill use.

The process of determining which study skills to teach and in what context should include a consideration of reading in the content areas as well. Although content area reading is discussed elsewhere in this guide, it is important to consider the topics together in the planning discussions. The unique content demands of each of the subject matter areas determine what study skills are important for instruction in study skills classes as well as in content area classes, although the emphasis would be different. In the reading classes, the emphasis is on the study skill, such as graph reading, whereas in a content area class, the emphasis is on the information presented about the topic of study and the study skill is the means of obtaining the information.

Independent Reading

Guidance in reading for recreation, pleasure and personal growth deserves specific attention along with skill development in the K-12 reading program. There appears to be evidence that people of all ages will read if motivated. Such motivation must not be left to chance but must be planned for in the school reading program. Teachers who are alert to student interests can help them to select materials that can satisfy personal needs and individual goals and help them to experience continued success in reading.

Teachers at all levels can demonstrate that they value reading by reading aloud to students and by allocating time in the school for personal reading. Appreciation for good literature, poetry and drama can be developed by sharing reading experiences; both teachers and students should be actively involved in sharing with each other favorite books and other good reading materials.

The foregoing discussion briefly presents the components of a reading program which are needed to bring students from "learning to read" to "reading to learn". Mature readers not only will demonstrate intellectual and emotional response to what has been read and understood, but also will read to satisfy personal needs and individual goals. To assist students to develop reading maturity, that is, to teach the attitudes and skills necessary for them to become capable independent learners is the ultimate goal of the K-12 reading program.

Implement the Program

Once the content of the reading program has been determined, program planners can direct their attention toward implementation. Implementation will include developing a scope and sequence for the content of the reading program, evaluating and selecting materials and methods, and organizing physical environments to provide for individual differences. Activities in each of these areas will depend to a large extent on the results of the assessment of the abilities of students.

Develop a scope and sequence of learning activities

A scope and sequence statement describes where and approximately when the specific content of the reading program will be taught. It is not simply a matter of walking into a "reading supermarket" and purchasing a "canned" program, however. Development of a scope and sequence statement requires a local planning process in which careful consideration must be given to the individual strengths and needs of the students in the school district. The entire staff within the local setting must decide—based on the district view of the reading process—in what order items should be listed, and the grade levels and/or curriculum areas in which they will be taught.

The scope and sequence statement can provide the basis for communication among staff members. It can assist in providing a systematic and continuous instructional program for students. A caution or two must be noted, however; the skill sequence must never be construed to be the total reading program. Some facets of the reading program do not lend themselves to placement in a skill sequence. There must be conscious provision of opportunities for children to read and systematic exposure to a wide variety of children's literature, magazines, signs, advertisements, poetry, plays, etc. The reading program must also include experiences geared to development of healthy attitudes about reading as well as concern for skill acquisition. Second, while skills are identified separately in a scope and sequence statement, that does not necessarily mean they are taught separately or learned separately. Isolated learning of vowels, plus digraphs, plus syllables does not add up to reading. There must be a common sense approach to skills instruction which allows for teaching them only when they will contribute most to reading development.

Since a wide range of reading abilities usually exists within a single grade level, there will inevitably be a disparity between the expected and the actual performance of students. There will be students who have already mastered the objectives for their level and others who know some or none of them. Therefore, the students' abilities must be identified to determine how they compare to the expected performance for their grade level as well as for lower grade levels if more basic skills have not been learned. Informal diagnostic tests, inventories, and teacher observations are a few of the tools available for sampling student performances. The important point is that the performance of the student must determine classroom instruction rather than the planned scope and sequence statement itself. The scope and sequence listing should be treated as a continuum or guide rather than a set of discrete skills specifically fixed to grade level designations in a lock-step organization.

Evaluate and select instructional materials

Research has not identified one best set of instructional materials or one best method of reading instruction. Studies of first grade reading programs indicate that the role of the teacher in instruction is more important that the materials selected. With this in mind, the major consideration in selecting materials and methods should be how well teachers will be able to use them to meet student needs and how well they match the purposes and objectives set for the district reading program.

Part of the evaluation and selection process will be inspecting reading materials and methods currently in use to determine if they correspond appropriately to the district program. This evaluation may result in a decision to purchase new materials. It is unfortunate but true that school districts frequently purchase a basal reader series and label that their reading program. A basal reader series may well be the material used for part of a K-12 program but it cannot be the whole. It is unlikely that any single commercial product will meet all the requirements of a district program. Therefore, to meet program purposes and objectives, several different types of materials will need to be selected.

Some of the commercial materials include specific methods for use, usually in the form of a teacher's manual; others are meant to be adapted to various methods at the teacher's discretion. There is a danger in selecting all materials that have explicitly described directions or methods. The teacher can come to rely exclusively on the manual and lose sight of a student's individual performances. Even though materials having specific directions are useful, the needs of the students must be considered first and the materials adapted to fit, rather than vice versa.

Organize for instruction

Just as research indicates no one best reading method or material, research also indicates no one best organizational plan for classrooms or schools. Teacher commitment and enthusiasm again seem more important than the organizational structure itself. If the teacher maintains continuity by using the scope and sequence outlined by the district as a guide for developing a classroom program, any organization that fits the teacher's style and students' needs could well be used. Therefore, within an elementary, junior high, or high school, there could be a variety of organizational structures in operation from classroom to classroom.

Choices about organizing elementary, junior high, and high schools and their classrooms should be made in support of the district reading curriculum. If curriculum decisions are made first, there is less likelihood of falling into the reorganization trap. Reorganization has become a pseudo-solution for program difficulties in many districts. It is a false solution because sometimes districts attempt to reorganize with little attention to either student or curriculum concerns.

No matter what type of school organization exists, junior high and high schools need to organize to accommodate at least three general types of students: (1) *those who need continued general instruction in how to read,* who may read at grade level or one to three years or more below expectation for their grade level, (2) *those who need instruction in reading expository writing, especially in textbook and study reading, and* (3) *those who need instruction in advanced study, research and critical reading skills.* To accommodate this wide range of needs, the basic upper level reading program must be planned for the content areas with content area teachers making adjustments in methods and materials to incorporate the reading strategies appropriate to each subject into their respective courses. Special reading classes such as remedial workshops, reading laboratories, and/or study skills classes will be needed to supplement the basic content area program in order to provide for the special needs of individual students. In each step of implementing the reading program, flexibility should be maintained to allow for the individual needs of all students.

Evaluate the Program

The evaluation of the reading curriculum should aim to judge the adequacy of the district's K-12 reading curriculum plan. Questions about the logical coherence and the adequacy of implementation of the plan should be addressed in addition to inquiries regarding the plan's effectiveness in bringing about its stated learner objectives. To be useful, the evaluation should be timely and adaptive. It should document program success as well as identify needs for improvement. If the evaluation is properly designed, it will not only identify needs in terms of learner performance deficits, but also will point to the programmatic elements which require modification.

Evaluations are sometimes conducted to meet federal or state mandates. Wisconsin law (sec. 118.015, Wis. Stats.) requires the local reading specialist to evaluate reading program implementation annually in terms of the district goals for the reading program. In addition to meeting a legislated requirement, however, feedback obtained through evaluation should provide timely information about the effectiveness of a program in meeting district reading goals and objectives. This allows the information to be used for positive program revision and modification. Here are three ways the information from an evaluation can be used:

1. *To improve the quality and effectiveness of the program.* Many of our best teaching techniques are discovered during the actual process of teaching. Good practices should be recognized immediately and continued, and nonproductive activities, materials or experiences should be eliminated. Ongoing evaluation reveals these innovations and promotes sharing the best of these with others.

An essential component of a good reading program evaluation is a plan that will provide timely information about the program's effectiveness. The evaluation process can be looked upon as a way of keeping the reading program on track and alerting staff to the need for change. Evaluation that is incorporated into the program planning cycle can make substantial contribution to improving the reading program.

2. *To keep the program on course.* Evaluators cannot simply assume that planned activities were actually carried out. Documented evidence must be gathered to show that each step of the plan was implemented as intended. This means that the master plan must have been written in clear specific language to begin with. The findings of ongoing evaluation should become part of the inservice program for teachers.

3. *To report the status of the program to interested individuals, groups, and agencies.* This use of the information fufills accountability functions.

Total program evaluation

With the purpose for evaluation clear, evaluation planning should begin. Evaluations should be designed to answer these three fundamental questions:

1. *Is the reading program plan being implemented in accordance with its written design?*

2. *Do the elements of the program plan hold together logically?*

3. *Are the outcomes from implementing the plan those which were desired?*

Curriculum planning assumes that there is a direct relationship between instructional activities and student outcomes. The curriculum plan prescribes the strategies and resources which will be applied to each learner objective. In order for these strategies and resources to be meaningfully evaluated, there must be some assurance that they actually were applied. We cannot simply assume that a plan has been implemented. Documented evidence should be provided to show that planned activities are actually being carried out.

In order to do this, the curriculum plan should be written concretely, making it easy to judge whether its prescriptions are being carried out. Systematic observation is the primary way of assessing plan implementation. Usually, well-organized and intensive observation will determine if the activities specified in your curriculum plan are happening. If they are not, let your observations reflect what is actually taking place.

To answer the second question, "Do elements of the program plan hold together logically?" study the parts of the program plan to determine if they are sensibly related to one another. For example, is the sequence of learner objectives pedagogically sound? Are the resources for teaching a particular objective appropriate to the specified grade leve? To some extent, the appropriateness of a particular strategy for a given objective or grade level is a matter of opinion. However, if there is any doubt about appropriateness, re-examine the portion of the master plan that deals with the strategies and objectives in question.

Third, are the outcomes from implementing the reading plan those which were desired? Student performance data are generally thought to be the basis for evaluative judgments. However, unless the curriculum plan holds together logically and is being implemented as designed, it makes little sense to proceed with an outcome evaluation. Student performance data are of no use in making judgments about the adequacy of a program that is not being carried out.

In all aspects of the evaluation, keep in mind that a district reading program is dynamic. Ideally, it is constantly undergoing revision, modification and, hopefully, improvement. Objectives may be altered, scope and sequence revised, and resources and instructional strategies modified or applied to different objectives as needs change.

One of the purposes of a K-12 evaluation is program improvement. A well-designed evaluation should point to needs as they emerge within the reading program context. In theory, the cycle of needs assessment, program planning, program implementation, and outcome evaluation should be repeated periodically. In practice, needs can be identified by a well developed evaluation design. This design not only changes with curricular changes, but illuminates the *need* for such changes.

To allow for effective modifications of the master plan, outcome data should be gathered close to the time of instruction on the objective being measured. This makes it easier to identify problem areas. If students perform poorly following instruction, then the area of the master plan related to the objective in question may be checked to discover if the plan is faulty. It is important to know how well the curriculum has been implemented, for the plan itself can be faulted only if it was followed by teachers and students. If there was variance from the plan and students performed poorly, the evaluation data will provide little information about the plan's adequacy. All that will be known is that the alternate approach was not adequate.

In conclusion, total program evaluation is often an afterthought, something added on after a program has been planned. Under such circumstances, its usefulness for actual program operations or improvement is questionable. If evaluation is to yield the information necessary for pro-

gram improvement as well as identify emerging needs, it must be successfully integrated into the planning and implementation of the K-12 reading program.

Student evaluation

Tests are usually a part of reading program evaluation. They are used to provide information: information for planning instruction, for estimating student growth, and for determining the success of the total reading program. Problems have arisen with test use because test users have not clearly identified the reasons for testing or the uses of the scores derived from tests.

Norm referenced instruments give information of a comparative nature. For example, how well does Jill read compared with Jane, or how good is Sam's reading skill development compared to other students at his grade level? If comparative information is desired as part of the district reading evaluation, then a norm referenced standardized test is a suitable instrument.

Most norm referenced reading tests, however, are quite global in nature and only a few items are selected to measure important skills. As a result these tests are not particularly sensitive to instruction aimed at specific learner objectives. This means they are of limited value for answering questions about the effectiveness of particular instructional strategies. Since one purpose of evaluation is to provide information about the degree to which goals and objectives of a program have been met, outcome measures that are too insensitive to determine the achievement of specific objectives are of marginal utility.

Criterion referenced tests are specifically designed for outcome evaluation. The items on this kind of test are derived from instructional objectives, and the instruments contain multiple items for each objective they measure. Specific tasks are presented and the students are assessed to determine whether or not they can complete the tasks. Thus, criterion referenced test results allow judgments about the effectiveness of instructional practices aimed at clearly stated objectives.

Any achievement test, whether criterion or norm referenced, is useful for curriculum evaluation only to the extent that its items reflect the objectives and content of that curriculum. While most of the commercial tests available will reflect many of your master plan's objectives, it is quite possible that no single test will measure them all. If this is the case the standardized tests must be augmented by additional items, by informal published tests, and/or by teacher constructed instruments.

A variety of instruments and techniques can provide information about student achievement not usually available from paper and pencil instruments. A comprehensive evaluation of student outcomes should utilize some of these procedures. The examples following describe the purpose, application and educational advantages of some useful evaluation tools:

Informal reading inventory

Purpose:
Indicates at which level a student should be placed in a basal reader series or other instructional material. Also indicates level of reading independence, frustration, and listening comprehension ability.

Application:
Places students whose reading abilities are in question.

Educational Advantages:
Helps place pupils in appropriate instructional materials.

Teacher constructed test

Purpose:
Indicates levels of comprehension, word attack skills, etc.

Application:
Provides an extended dimension to the over-all testing procedures of the reading program.

Educational Advantages:

Allows more specific assessment than standardized diagnostic tests provide. Can be constructed from the educational materials in the reading program and thus facilitate instruction within that reading program.

Commercial materials mastery

Purpose:

Indicates performance on specific skills or content covered in particular lessons and units of work.

Application:

Provides information about pupil mastery of the current reading program and assists with placement in both basal and supplementary materials.

Educational Advantages:

Indicates students' specific weaknesses. Identifies for teachers the concepts or skills requiring reteaching or reassignment for independent study.

Readability formula

Purpose:

Indicates approximate grade level of reading difficulty in content area texts, indicates serious inconsistencies within particular texts, and grade level difficulty of reference or supplementary educational materials.

Application:

Allows appropriate selection of textbooks for content areas and selection of supplementary reading materials for unit teaching, or individual student projects.

Educational Advantages:

Permits independent reading to be assigned for projects, etc., with confidence that learners can handle general difficulty level of materials. Allows for modification of assignments, specific teaching as required for students to be successful using specific materials. Allows for articulation and communication between reading program and content area reading materials.

Skills monitoring system

Purpose:

Measures skill development in comprehension, word attack, study skills, vocabulary, etc. Usually reported by specific skill levels.

Application:

Provides detailed measurement in specific skill areas of the reading program.

Educational Advantages:

Aids in planning for new skills instruction or identifies need for reteaching. Provides student measurement for skill grouping. Facilitates using a multi-materials concept as a basis for a reading program.

Teacher observation

Purpose:

Allows teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses in the specific classroom instructional program.

Application:

Assists teachers to develop or purchase instructional materials that provide a variety of learning experiences, based on observed needs. Assists teachers to plan appropriate instruction based on observed needs.

Educational Advantages:

Matches learners and learning experiences. Emphasizes instruction geared to learner characteristics instead of program process.

Informal skills inventory related to content area textbook

Purpose:

Assists teachers to identify specific areas of strength and areas of weakness in any group of students which require instruction before students can gain maximum benefit from reading the text.

Application:

Assists teachers to modify teaching techniques and student assignments to match instruction with student needs.

Educational Advantages:

Permits teachers to maximize student reading experiences in any textbook.

Interest and/or Attitude Inventory

Purpose:

Determine student attitudes and interests in reading.

Application:

Reinforces importance of and respect for individual interests and attitudes as part of the learning process.

Educational Advantages:

Permits teachers to develop and use activities which will encourage students to read; permits teachers to find and recommend books and library materials which are of interest to students based on student response.

Questions for Discussion

Chapter III: A Process for Reading Program Improvement

State a Philosophy of Reading: Questions planners might consider are the following:

1. Does the philosophy indicate beliefs about students, learning and reading?
2. Does the philosophy state broad, general goals?
3. Is the philosophy based on a local philosophy of education?

Set Goals: Planners might consider the following questions.

1. Are the goals based on a local philosophy of reading?
2. Do the goals present broad, general areas of focus for the program?
3. Are the goals based on the needs assessment?
4. Are the goals prioritized, i.e., what must be done first? second?

Notes:

Assess the Existing Program: Planners might assess the following:

A. Student
   1. Determine interests and attitudes of students.
   2. Determine the present reading levels of children.
   3. Determine to some degree learning style (s) of students.
   4. Determine the reading potential of the children.
   5. Isolate the specific kinds of reading problems the children are having.
   6. Determine as nearly as possible the causes of underachievement.

B. Staff
   1. Inventory the present staff in the reading program, including classroom teachers and reading specialists. This inventory might include their training, experience, abilities, and orientation.
   2. Inventory nonreading staff who are available, e.g., psychologists, speech and hearing therapists, guidance counselors. This inventory might also include their knowledge of reading and the factors which can interfere with effective reading.

C. Present reading program
   1. Location in the school (e.g., classroom, reading lab)
   2. The basic approaches used (basal readers, individualized reading, phonics emphasis)
   3. The time available for reading
   4. The type of classroom grouping and organization (self-contained, departmentalized, open classroom, team teaching, Joplin plan and other specialized plans)
   5. The use of reading specialists (e.g., one-to-one remedial teaching, consultant to classroom teacher, resource centers)
   6. Inservice training in reading for specialists and classroom teachers
   7. The present reading evaluation plan, including recordkeeping patterns
   8. The impact on the reading program of other school programs (e.g., Title I and other "Title" programs, the use of aides, etc.)

D. Parent and community
   1. Inventory or survey parents of children
   2. Inventory or survey members of business community

E. The school plant and resources
   1. The size, location and resources of the school library
   2. The reading resources and materials—machines, audio-visual equipment available in the classroom or elsewhere in the building.

F. The availability of fiscal resources
   1. Money available to the reading program from the local school budget
   2. "Title" monies
   3. Private foundations

G. Professional resources available
   1. Specialized clinics, reading centers, colleges and university departments, private reading specialists, CESAS, the Department of Public Instruction
   2. Consultant help available from sources similar to the above
   3. Mental health centers, psychologists, psychiatrists, private reading tutors, etc.

The above outline can be expanded or shortened to conform with the kind of needs assessment desired locally. Also see the Wisconsin Self-Assessment Process for Developing K-12 Reading Programs for charts to monitor each step in the assessment process and to assist districts in establishing time-lines for beginning and completion of the task.

Notes:

Identify the Components: Some questions planners could consider in developing a word analysis component would be the following:

1. What word recognition skills should be taught? Which are necessary to success in reading?
2. Are these the same skills that are in the current reading materials? If not, how can the materials or the program be modified to include the skills identified?
3. Should word recognition skills be taught in relationship to context or as separate skills?
4. Should the skills be sequenced? If so, how?
5. What proportion of the program should be given to word recognition skill instruction at each grade level?
6. What provisions should be made for application of word recognition skills?

Notes:

Comprehension: The following questions can be of help in identifying the content of comprehension instruction:

1. What comprehension skills should be taught?
2. Can or should comprehension skills be sequenced? If so how?
3. Should a skills management list of comprehension objectives be developed?
4. How will the relationship between comprehension and word recognition be supported?
5. What attention will be given to systematically developing meaning vocabulary?
6. Should the topics of affixes and context be included in comprehension or word recognition lists?
7. What proportion of the program should be given to instruction in comprehension at each grade level?
8. How will comprehension skills be measured?
9. How will comprehension performance be recorded?

Notes:

Content area reading: These questions about content area reading can be considered:

1. What study skills are necessary for students to function effectively in the elementary school classroom setting? Middle school classrooms? High School classrooms?
2. What study skills are most appropriately taught at each grade level?
3. What study skills are required for reading in each subject matter area?
4. How will schools provide for application of study skills outside of the reading class? in content areas? in functional situations?
5. How will content area teachers use reading strategies to facilitate reading of materials in their content area?
6. What materials will be used in each content area to supplement the basic text and accommodate the variable reading abilities of the students?
7. What evaluation devices will be used by content area teachers to determine students' abilities to read the textbooks?
8. What measure (s) will be used to identify the readability of the textbooks for each content area?
9. What reading instruction is appropriate for each content area teacher to use in guiding the reading of the textbook?
10. What are some appropriate teaching strategies for developing understanding of complex concepts and vocabulary?

Notes:

Independent reading: The following questions can serve as guides in determining elements which may encourage children to read independently for pleasure and personal career purposes:

1. What proportion of the school day will be provided for independent reading?
2. How can teachers model good reading habits?
3. What techniques, such as reading aloud to children, can the teacher employ to stimulate interest in books?
4. What access should children have to books?
5. What types of reading material should be made available to children beyond the basic instructional materials?
6. Should independent reading be informally organized by classroom teachers or more formally implemented such as through strategies like S.S.R. (Sustained Silent Reading) or SQUIRT (Super Quiet Uninterrupted Reading Time) ?
7. What techniques can the teacher use to identify reading interests of the students?

Notes:

Implement the Program: Deciding what content and how it will be taught is based on the district view of the reading process, the reading approach and commercial materials selected, and selected curriculum principles. Questions to guide decision making are listed below:

1. What should be the sequence of skills listings?
2. What skillls should be introduced at approximately what grade levels?
3. What skills should be repeated across grade levels?
4. What degree of emphasis will be placed on a skill at what grade levels?
5. How much review of skills should be provided?
6. How will the reading program provide for continuous progress?
7. What kind of record keeping system will monitor the child's progress through the program?
8. Which skills will be checked for mastery?
9. What skills will receive subjective evaluation?
10. Are skills and content covered adequately at each level?

Notes:

School organization: General questions to consider when organizing school and classroom environments are listed below:

1. Which organization plan (s) would allow for the best implementation of the reading program?
2. What specific help would the staff need to implement new organizational plans?
3. How will the reading program provide for individual differences in skills? Interests? Learning styles?
4. What resources are currently available to provide for individual differences?
5. What additions will be needed to accommodate individual differences?
6. What procedures will be used to identify those students who qualify for special programs?
7. How will the specific needs of children in standard classrooms be identified?
8. What evaluation procedures will be used to assess progress?
9. What record keeping systems will be used to report progress?

Notes:

Selecting instructional materials: The following questions can be considered as a base for instructional materials selection criteria:

1. Do the materials approximate the scope and sequence of the reading program?
2. Do the materials include all parts of the reading program?
3. What existing district materials match the components of the reading program?
4. Is there a sufficient number of activities for practicing skills?
5. Does the basic method of instruction in the materials correspond to the district's view of reading?
6. Are there provisions for application of the skills learned?
7. Do the materials provide for individual differences?
8. Do the materials reflect the multiethnic nature of our culture?
9. Do the materials provide an evaluation component?

Notes:

Evaluate the program: Following are questions to discuss regarding a comprehensive evaluation of the reading program:

1. Is there a clear and useful rationale for program evaluation?
2. Does the evaluation report describe student progress, including growth beyond the scope of stated objectives?
3. Does the evaluation model suggest methods of evaluation to help the individual build a positive self-image?
4. Does the evaluation model help teachers diagnose individual learning progress and suggest methods and material to accomplish this?
5. Does the evaluation model include the student in the evaluation process?
6. Does the evaluation model identify emerging program needs?
7. Does the evaluation model suggest ways that teachers and students can use the results of evaluation to change the program as often as necessary?

Notes:

The Payoff

Newspaper headlines, magazine articles and other evidence of public interest in reading continue to affect reading instruction in classrooms and schools. Reports indicate a shift from sole attention to the methods for teaching early reading, that is, for teaching students to figure out what printed words say, to include concern that high school and college students do not have the skills to learn through reading at the required level. For example, teachers say students seem unable to retain what they read, or to keep arguments or facts in their heads long enough to make them their own.

Much of today's reading is complex information processing which requires continued reading instruction at the secondary level where reading programs did not exist before. The instruction is designed to go beyond figuring out what printed words say to getting students used to the language of description, explanation and argument in high school and college level textbooks and expository writing. The process of developing a K-12 reading program then must lead to the goal of developing competent adult readers who are able to function effectively in a literate society and who are willing to use reading for the fulfillment of personal goals.

For school staff members who have worked long and hard to develop a comprehensive K-12 reading program, the rewards are extensive. They have the satisfaction of working with a structure that provides for efficient use of teacher time and district resources, while at the same time allowing autonomy and creativity as they perform their professional responsibilities. In addition, teachers will have the gratification of seeing students successfully using reading in the management of their daily lives both in and out of school.

In the final analysis, all the efforts of reading instruction and of K-12 reading program development must be directed toward the utilization of the reading process. The payoff is not that people learn how to read, but that they do read!

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